

Haiti: Post-Hurricane Conditions and Assistance

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Summary

In August and September 2008, four major storms directly hit or passed close to Haiti, causing widespread devastation. As of early October, 2008, the U.S. government has either provided or pledged just over \$30 million in humanitarian assistance to affected Haitian populations in response to the hurricanes in Haiti. Congress provided not less than \$100 million for hurricane relief and reconstruction assistance for Haiti and other Caribbean countries in the FY2009 continuing appropriations resolution (P.L. 110-329) signed into law September 30, 2008. The Haitian government says it needs \$400 million over the next 18 months for hurricane recovery and reconstruction, and that so far the international community has committed \$145 million. For more information, see CRS Report RL34687, *The Haitian Economy and the HOPE Act*, by J. F. Hornbeck; CRS Report RS22879, *Haiti: Legislative Responses to the Food Crisis and Related Development Challenges*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and J. F. Hornbeck; CRS Report RS21349, *U.S. Immigration Policy on Haitian Migrants*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem; and CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Current Immigration Policy and Issues*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem and Karma Ester.

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Current Conditions

Since August, four major storms have directly struck or passed close to Haiti, killing hundreds and affecting hundreds of thousands of people. The storms have caused flooding in all ten of the country's departments. Tropical Storm Fay struck Haiti on August 16 while Hurricane Gustav struck on August 26 with heavy rains and winds. In the first days of September, Tropical Storm Hanna brought more torrential rain, causing floods as deep as almost ten feet in Gonaives. Hurricane Ike did not directly strike Haiti, but significantly increased water levels in areas that were already flooded. Overall, almost 500 people have died.

Haiti was already experiencing a food crisis; the impact of the storms has greatly exacerbated the problem, mainly due to flooding. The storms destroyed approximately one-third of the country's rice crop. Haiti's rice crop is essentially used for domestic consumption, and reportedly is a lifeline for many Haitians.¹ Livestock, other crops, seeds, and farm equipment were destroyed as well. The storms hit during harvest season, meaning that farmers will not have capital from this crop to reinvest in future crops. Some observers worry that additional food shortages and price increases could again lead to riots, like the ones in April of this year that killed several people and contributed to the dismissal of the Prime Minister.

Table 1. Impact of the 2008 Hurricanes
(as of October 21, 2008)

Total Affected Population	826,685
Dead	793
Missing	310
Internally Displaced Persons	151,072
Internally Displaced Persons in Shelters	35,000 - 40,000
Houses Destroyed	22,702
Houses Damaged	84,625

Source: USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID, DCHA/OFDA), "Haiti - Storms, Fact Sheet #3, FY2009," October 21, 2008.

Nearly 70% of the internally displaced persons living in shelters in the wake of the storms were in the Department of Artibonite, known as Haiti's rice bowl. In the departmental capital of Gonaives, at least 80% of the city's 300,000 residents were affected. Nearly half of those affected by the storm are reportedly children. Almost half of the shelters across the country are located in schools. The Haitian Ministry of Education is working with international organizations to clean and rehabilitate schools and find alternative shelters. The number of internally displaced people living in shelters dropped from just over 111,000 in mid-September to an estimated 35,000 to 40,000 in mid-October. Nonetheless, some schools will share their space with displaced people until they are able to return to their homes. Moreover, many families who have lost their homes and possessions will not be able to afford school costs for their children. Even though damage to

¹ Frances Robles and Jacqueline Charles, "Storm Victims Left Hungry in Caribbean," *Miami Herald*, September 17, 2008.

schools delayed the start of the school year by over a month, the UN World Food Program has already resumed school feeding programs throughout most of the country.²

Prior to the storms, the Haitian Office for Disaster Preparedness issued warnings through radio and television, although not all citizens have access to those media. After the storms, the Haitian government declared eight departments to be under a state of emergency, allowing for the release of extra funding from the national budget for relief efforts in those areas. The government is coordinating emergency response through the Civilian Protection Unit of the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior is coordinating the distribution of relief assistance, working with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the Red Cross, and a U.S. ship with hospital capability, the USS Kearsarge, all of which are providing helicopters for delivering food and water aid to remote and inaccessible areas. The Minister of Finance has lifted regulations on incoming aid for several months so that disaster relief assistance will not be subject to the usual customs delays. All government ministers were dispatched around the country to help assess needs and compose lists of assistance requirements for international donors.

U.S. Disaster Assistance to Haiti

The U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, Janet Sanderson, issued a disaster declaration on September 2, 2008, in response to the flooding throughout the country caused by Hurricane Gustav. Subsequently, U.S. officials from the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense (DOD) met with Haitian President René Prével, who said that infrastructure and transportation were key priorities; many roads and bridges were washed away or heavily damaged by the storms. Prével also requested general assistance for the next six months.

As of October 21, 2008, the U.S. government has either provided or pledged over \$31 million in humanitarian assistance to affected Haitian populations in response to the storms. This includes:

- \$10 million, USAID/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), including support to the American Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Pan American Health Organization;
- \$14 million, USAID/Food for Peace (FFP) assistance provided through the U.N. World Food Program;
- \$5 million, USAID/Haiti assistance, re-directing regular U.S. foreign aid funding toward food and other humanitarian assistance;
- \$2.6 million, Department of Defense assistance (helicopter transport); and
- (still to be determined), Department of Homeland Security, for Coast Guard transportation and logistics.³

USAID's OFDA also authorized the deployment of a three-member support team to Haiti to supplement a U.N. disaster team based in the city of Gonaïves. The USS Kearsarge has delivered almost 2 million pounds of supplies, with supplies ferried by helicopters and boats to affected

² U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Situation Report #13, Haiti: Tropical Storm Hanna, Gustav, Ike Update," September 17, 2008; Report #21, October 9, 2008, and USAID, DCHA/OFDA, "Haiti - Storms, Fact Sheet #3, FY2009," October 21, 2008.

³ USAID, DCHA/OFDA, "Haiti - Storms, Fact Sheet #3, FY2009," October 21, 2008. For latest update, see "Haiti" at USAID's Disaster Assistance site: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/.

areas.⁴ OFDA has been providing assistance in disaster preparedness and mitigation, including training in disaster management, to the Caribbean since 1991. From FY2005 to FY2007, OFDA worked in conjunction with the UN Development Program to reduce the risks faced by vulnerable Haitian populations due to natural hazards.

A number of observers, including some Members of Congress, are calling for significantly more assistance to help Haiti in its recovery and reconstruction efforts. Representative Maxine Waters has called for at least \$300 million in appropriations in assistance for Haiti.⁵ The FY2009 continuing resolution signed into law on September 30, 2008 (P.L. 110-329) provides not less than \$100 million for hurricane relief and reconstruction assistance for Haiti and other Caribbean countries subject to prior consultation with, and the regular notification procedures of, the Committees on Appropriations.

At a hearing of the House Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere on “Hurricanes in Haiti: Disaster and Recovery” on September 23, 2008, several Members of Congress called for the Administration to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Haitians living in the United States to give Haiti time to deal with the effects of the recent hurricanes. Haiti’s Ambassador to the United States, Raymond Joseph, maintains that his country is ill-prepared to receive deportees.⁶ Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary Kirsten Madison said the State Department had not made a recommendation, but did not wish to encourage an exodus of Haitians from the island to the U.S. by granting TPS, saying that could create another humanitarian disaster. The State Department also noted that the final decision lies with the Department of Homeland Security. Members expressed concerns that the devastation from the storms, if insufficiently addressed, could lead to famine and widespread waterborne diseases, which in turn could contribute to an increase in the number of Haitians fleeing their country.

International Disaster Assistance to Haiti

Haitian Ambassador Joseph stated at a Capitol Hill forum on September 18 that Haiti would need \$400 million over the next 18 months for hurricane recovery and reconstruction, and that so far the international community had committed \$145 million. It is unclear how much of the \$400 million reflects short-term humanitarian needs as opposed to longer-term development needs. At the request of the Haitian government, the World Bank and other international partners are conducting a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment that will be the basis for early recovery and strategic planning for Haiti.

In the aftermath of the hurricanes, the U.N. OCHA issued an international flash appeal for \$108 million for Haiti’s recovery. As of October 23, contributions and commitments of funds amounted to almost \$25 million, while another \$16.9 million has been pledged, but not yet committed, by the United States, the European Union, and 12 other countries—Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway, Austria, Luxembourg, Ireland, Greece, Andorra, Italy, and the Netherlands. The aid is channeled through a variety of U.N. agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), U.N.

⁴ Jacqueline Charles, “Miami Sends Storm Relief to Haiti,” *Miami Herald*, September 19, 2008.

⁵ *Congressional Record*, September 15, 2008, p. H8110.

⁶ Lesley Clark, “Rep. Meek: Let Haitians Stay in U.S.,” *Miami Herald*, September 12, 2008; For additional information on TPS, see CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Current Immigration Policy and Issues*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem and Karma Ester.

Development Program (UNDP), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The U.S. contribution equals 42.8% of that funding.

MINUSTAH is also helping to coordinate disaster assistance, providing support for relief deliveries, and has been involved in rescuing Haitians from the floods. In addition to assistance contributed to the flash appeal, OCHA reports that another \$25 million in humanitarian assistance has been pledged or provided by the United States and other countries and international organizations.⁷

Legislation in the 110th Congress

P.L. 110-329 (H.R. 2638). Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009. Provides not less than \$100 million for hurricane relief and reconstruction assistance for Haiti and other Caribbean countries subject to prior consultation with, and the regular notification procedures of, the Committees on Appropriations. Introduced June 8, 2007, signed into law September 30, 2008.

H.R. 522 (Hastings). Would require the Secretary of Homeland Security to designate Haiti as a country whose qualifying nationals may be eligible for temporary protected status for an initial 18-month period. Introduced January 17, 2007, referred to House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law February 2, 2007.

H.Con.Res. 438 (Lee). Expressing the sense of Congress with regard to providing humanitarian assistance to countries of the Caribbean devastated by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike and Tropical Storms Fay and Hanna. Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs September 27, 2008.

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⁷ Donor funding is listed, and continually updated, at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fts.nsf/doc105?OpenForm&rc=2&cc=hti>.

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